

we raise it by \$2.10. To many, \$2.10 is nothing more than a cup of coffee at a high-priced coffee shop today or a few sodas or a sandwich along the way, but it makes a difference, Mr. President.

An increase in the minimum wage of \$2.10, after nearly a decade, will add some \$4,400 to the incomes of people who are depending upon the minimum wage to provide for themselves and their families. Remember whom we are talking about. The overwhelming majority of minimum wage workers are not teenagers, but are adults—working people trying to raise families, 60 percent of whom are women, many of whom are raising children on their own. So this \$2.10 increase after nearly a decade, an additional \$4,400 per year, means a great deal.

We are told by those who do the math on all of this that the increase could buy as much as 15 months of groceries for that families, 8 months of rent, 20 months of childcare—an issue that I worked with our colleague on many years ago—the importance of having a decent childcare program. As you are saying to these people, you have to stay at work and you have young children, where do the children go? The average cost of childcare rises all the time for people in this country. How do you expect someone making a minimum wage of \$5.15 per hour who has two or three young children to keep them in a safe place with that kind of an income level? That \$4,400 would be a tremendous help at that income level. That is the kind of difference we are talking about.

A group called America's Second Harvest has recently reported that they provide emergency hunger relief services to more than 25.3 million low-income people in the United States each year. That is an 18-percent increase since 1997. No other organization in our country does as much on a national level as Second Harvest does.

The numbers are quite clear. Over the last 4 or 5 years, we have watched an increase in children living in poverty in the United States climb by 1.4 million. What we are talking about is some 13 million children today who are living in poverty. Of the 37 million in our country, 13 million children who, through no fault of their own, through the accident of birth, are born into difficult circumstances. Those poverty numbers are going up. They are not going down.

What do we do about these children? How do we guarantee this child will get a good education? How do you learn anything in a school today if you are going to that school hungry? Talk to any grade school teacher in America in any community you wish and ask them the simple question: What is the difference between a child who has a decent meal in the morning and one who doesn't, in terms of their ability to learn, and they will tell you categorically that a child who is hungry doesn't learn.

We talk all the time about making sure America is going to be strong and

vital and economically competitive in the global marketplace of the 21st century. If we continue increasing child poverty at the rate it is increasing now, this country will have a very difficult time, in my view, of meeting the competitive challenges it will face in this century.

So this proposal does make a difference—a huge difference—in the lives of people who struggle every day, good Americans out there who are trying to keep their families together. How does anyone expect a family today, particularly a family with two or three children, to live on a full-time salary of \$10,700 a year? That is what you get with \$5.15—\$10,700 per year. I don't know of anyone who believes that you can meet your obligations of housing and food, of medical care you may need. You have to make terrible choices at that level.

I am not suggesting that \$7.25 is going to solve all of those problems. But the cost of living has gone up. Everyone knows that. What has happened to gasoline prices and energy prices over the last number of months?

We have increased our salaries as Members of Congress by over \$31,000 since 1997. Again, I have supported a number of those increases. How do we look in the mirror and say: A \$31,000 increase for a Senator, a Congressman. Yet we can't provide a \$2.10 per hour increase for someone making the minimum wage? How do we answer that question? We know the cost of living has gone up. We see it every single day. Minimum wage workers see it in a more painful way.

So I hope my colleagues, in the next 45 minutes when we have a chance to vote on this issue, vote for the Kennedy amendment. Raise the minimum wage that \$2.10 and give these people a chance. Let's bring these poverty numbers down. All of us, regardless of party, ideology or anything else, ought to be committed to see to it in the United States of America that child poverty doesn't go up, it goes down. These are innocents. They didn't do anything except be born into a circumstance not of their choosing. We owe them and we owe the future of this country a lot better than they are getting. After one long decade of increasing prices, \$2.10 is very little to ask. Democrats and Republicans ought to be able to come together around that request.

I hope that we can make that kind of difference. My colleague from Massachusetts and others want to be heard on this issue. I have great respect for my colleague from Wyoming who chairs our committee and does a terrific job, and we work together on many issues. But my hope is we accept the Kennedy amendment.

I didn't go into the problems of the alternative proposal, but it would mean that millions of children will get a lot less than they will if you adopt the Kennedy proposal of \$2.10. This is a time when we ought to be doing what

we can to strengthen those in our country who need some help now. That is all we are asking.

I have some 350,000 people in my State who show up at food shelters to get some assistance. That is in the most affluent State of the country on a per-capita basis, and even the State of Connecticut faces difficulties on this issue.

I know my colleagues from less affluent States see the problem in a far more dramatic way. It is not lost on me that States that have the lowest minimum wage at the State level have the highest levels of child poverty. With all the money we spend here, this is little to ask.

Small business is interested. A poll conducted among small businesses found that 86 percent of small businesses responded that an increase like this in the minimum wage is acceptable to them. In fact, studies in other countries have pointed out that their economies have not been adversely affected by this.

If small businesses said an increase is warranted, we as Members of the Congress ought not be holding back. If people who pay this wage believe it is the right thing to do, Members of Congress ought to join with them.

I urge my colleagues to support the Kennedy amendment—\$2.10 to make life a little easier for people out there struggling every day to make ends meet. This is the United States of America. These children deserve better. Their families deserve at least an opportunity to get out from under the tremendous burdens they are facing every day. I urge adoption of the amendment when the vote occurs.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I yield 10 minutes to the Senator from New Hampshire.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized for 10 minutes.

Mr. GREGG. I thank the Senator for his proposal which I think is a very thoughtful and effective way of addressing many issues, which especially single women in the workplace, especially single moms in the workplace have today. These are issues which are not addressed by the Kennedy amendment.

Whether it is \$1.10 or \$2.05, that is an important debate because it will have an important effect on how many jobs are created, and the impact on job creation and jobs is what we are talking about here. If you start losing jobs because you raise the minimum wage too quickly, so fast that small employers can't afford it, that is going to have an effect on people's opportunity to work.

I think the Senator from Wyoming has put forth a much more balanced approach as to what number the minimum wage should be raised by, but that is not what is going to make the workplace a more tolerable event and a